Stakeholder informed considerations for a food poverty definition

Stakeholder informed considerations for a food poverty definition

Abstract

Purpose: A number of food poverty definitions have been identified by academics and various government organisations globally, however there exists no government-endorsed definition of food poverty in the United Kingdom (UK), and there remains a gap regarding how relevant current food poverty definitions are in the Northern Ireland (NI)/UK contexts.

Methodology: Interviews (n=19) with a range of stakeholders (e.g. policy makers, politicians, community advice centre workers, consumer sub-group representatives, food bank and food redistribution organisation representatives) were conducted to examine (i) the usefulness of a food poverty definition, (ii) what a food poverty definition should include, and (iii) the applicability of an existing definition (Radimer *et al*., 1992) in the NI/UK context. Data was thematically analysed using QSR NVivo (v.12).

Findings: Definition was considered important to increase awareness and understanding. Any consideration of revising the Radimer *et al* (1992) definition, or of establishing a new standardised definition, should seek to reduce/remove ambiguity and subjectivity of terminology used (i.e. more clearly defining what the terms 'adequate', 'sufficient', 'quality', and 'socially acceptable ways' mean in this context).

Practical Implications: This research emphasises the importance of appropriately conceptually defining social phenomena such as food poverty, as a first step to constructing and reviewing measurement approaches, and ultimately assessing predictors and recommending solutions.

Originality/value: This research addresses the gap relating to stakeholders opinion on food poverty definition, and contributes recommendations for modifying the Radimer *et al* (1992) definition in the NI/UK, and present day, contexts.

Key words: food poverty; food access; definition; stakeholder; qualitative analysis

Introduction

Prior to the 2019 announcement that food poverty (also referred to as household food insecurity) will be routinely measured in the United Kingdom (UK), there has been no established, government-endorsed indicator of food poverty in the UK (Smith *et al*., 2018; Thompson *et al*., 2018; Butler, 2019), nor is there a government-endorsed definition of food poverty (O'Connor *et al*., 2016; O'Connell *et al*., 2019). Although the methodology used prior to 2019 to approximate food poverty has been somewhat inconsistent in terms of the choice of indicator used, resultant statistics have evidenced that there exists a significant problem of food poverty in the UK (Bell and Scarlett, 2016; Food Foundation, 2017), which is likely to be exacerbated as a result of the economic implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on some households (Loopstra, 2020; Defeyter *et al*., 2020). Recent survey data found that 8% of adults, and 7% of working adults across England, Wales and Northern Ireland (NI) have experienced inadequate access to food due to a lack of money (Food Foundation, 2017). In NI specifically, the most recently published results from the Health Survey for Northern Ireland in 2015/16 found that 4% of households reported that there had been at least one day when they had not eaten a substantial meal in the last fortnight due to a lack of money (Bell and Scarlett, 2016). Population survey findings regarding food poverty prevalence have been further endorsed by the increase in food banks across the UK (Lambie-Mumford, 2019).

Despite this dual-evidence base, discussing food poverty in developed countries can be

controversial as there endures an opinion by some that food poverty does not truly exist in the Global North, or at least that it does not manifest to the extent that it occurs in developing countries (O'Hagan, 2013; Lanchester, 2014). For example, certain political party councillors and media commentators have opined that food banks are unnecessary, that they are an insult to starving people around the world, and that donating to food banks facilitates recipients spending more money on alcohol, cigarettes and tattoos (O'Hagan, 2013; Purdam *et al*., 2016).

Lack of understanding as to what the term 'food poverty' means or how it is experienced is a possible contributor to this controversy. O'Connor *et al* (2016) contextualise food poverty alongside the wider term of 'food security', explaining that although both are influenced by the principles of food availability, access, utilization and stability (FAO, 2006; McKay *et al*., 2019), food poverty is distinguished by being primarily concerned with the access component at the household level. The term 'food security' is often used at a national and global level, regarding whether countries have an adequate, safe, food supply *available* to feed their populations (FAO, 2006). However perceptions have evolved in that the term food security is increasingly being used at the micro level of communities, households and individuals, regarding their ability to *access* sufficient food (Dowler *et al*., 2001). This is evidenced by the shift in the Food and Agricultural Organisations definition of the concept:

> *'**availability** at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices'* (FAO, **1974**, cited by FAO, 2006, p. 1),
>
> '*ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic **access** to the basic food that they need*' (FAO, **1983**, cited by FAO, 2006, p. 1).

This emphasis on the access element of food security is complementary to Sens' conceptual theory that people often become food insecure not due to food being unavailable on the market, but rather because of limitations of their ability to access that food which is available (Webb *et al*., 2006). In developed countries such as the US and UK, issues of food availability and utilization are not as problematic as in developing countries, therefore definition and measurement primarily focus on household-level access (Coates *et al*., 2006). It is this household level inability to access adequate food which is commonly termed 'household food insecurity' in countries such as the USA and Canada, an equivalent term to 'food poverty' in the UK (Dowler *et al*., 2001; Lambie-Mumford, 2013; Taylor-Robinson *et al*., 2013). The term 'food insecurity' is however becoming increasingly familiar in the UK literature (see Purdy *et al*., 2007; Dowler and O'Connor, 2012; Kneafsey *et al*., 2013), and both terms are now often used synonymously (Dowler and O'Connor, 2012; Borsch and Kjaernes, 2016; Thompson *et al*., 2018). This shift of discourse in the UK is a likely result of the influence of food security nomenclature in the US and Canada, where household food insecurity (food poverty) is routinely measured. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) measures household food insecurity annually and adopts Anderson's (1990, p.1) definition which refers to food insecurity as a state occurring when one has

> *'limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways'*.

Unlike the government-endorsed definition of household food insecurity in the US (USDA, 2019), food poverty has not received an accepted definition from government in the UK (Carney and Maître, 2012). Various perspectives exist as to whether it is adequate to imply food poverty within the poverty nomenclature or if it should be singled out as a separate cohort. Some question the utility of separating food poverty from poverty as this may lead to a response

focused on providing more food, rather than addressing structural determinants of wider poverty (Tarasuk, 2001; Lambie-Mumford, 2019). 'Fuel poverty' can be considered a counterpart to food poverty as food and fuel are consensually considered to be necessities. 'Fuel poverty' has however been separated from the overarching poverty nomenclature, and afforded a government-endorsed quantitative definition (a household is defined as fuel poor if they spend more than 10% of their income on heating the home) (DECC, 2019; Boardman, 1991). There therefore exists scope to examine whether a similar quantitative headline indicator would be feasible for food poverty, or whether an experiential qualitative definition/indicator is more appropriate.

A quantitative definition/indicator of food poverty in the UK similar to that for fuel poverty could assess a household's ability to financially access food, however it is likely not to be sufficient to capture other dimensions of food poverty, such as the social acceptability or nutritional status of the food consumed. Including social acceptability as a component of a food poverty definition was first introduced in 1990 by Anderson, who expanded the concept of food poverty, implying both the aforementioned elements of availability and access to food, and including that the food should be nutritionally adequate and that consumption of food should be socially acceptable. Anderson's (1990) definition was latterly adopted by the USDA, as cited above.

The theoretical underpinning that a food poverty definition should reference social needs stems from Townsend's (1979) research that both physical and social needs are interlinked. For example, foods or beverages served socially to others in one's home may not be important nutritionally but are important for social needs (Hick, 2014; O'Connell *et al.*, 2019). The concept of social acceptability therefore moves beyond nutritional considerations to those of justice and equality, and emphasises the importance of social inclusion and participation (Furey

et al., 1999; Lambie-Mumford, 2019; Healy, 2019). Although the social implications of food poverty are not essential for nutritional wellbeing, the ability to eat with others and to provide food for friends and family in one's home are essential and significant aspects of life (Pfeiffer *et al*., 2015). In a consumer society the food we access is linked to our identity, and can be a means of social inclusion and exclusion (O'Connell *et al.,* 2019). Therefore it is of interest whether stakeholders (both those who have the power to influence policy and those who have first-hand experience working with those in food poverty), think that the singular most important definitional aspect of food poverty is financial access, and that a quantitative headline definition similar to fuel poverty would therefore be sufficient, or whether these other aforementioned dimensions are of enough importance to merit a qualitative definition.

In a previous study to address the gap regarding food poverty definition in the UK, O'Connor *et al* (2016) examined the food poverty literature to identify the dimensions of food poverty most commonly cited in published definitions to inform construction of a new definition. O'Connor *et al* (2016) identified the following components to be cited most frequently: economic access, quality, quantity, duration and the social dimension, and consequently proposed the below definition as suitable for both developed and developing countries, which states that food poverty is

> *"the insufficient economic access to an adequate quantity and quality of food to maintain a nutritionally satisfactory and socially acceptable diet"* (O'Connor *et al*., 2016, p. 429).

Interestingly, O'Connor *et al*'s (2016) exploratory review results were similar to Radimer *et al's* (1990) previous empirical findings regarding the conceptualisation of food poverty.

Radimer *et al* (1990) carried out qualitative research with women in New York, USA, on the household-level experience of food insecurity, and found that it is experienced primarily through the four domains of (i) uncertainty or worry regarding food; (ii) food of inadequate quantity; (iii) food of inadequate quality; and (iv) acquiring food through socially unacceptable means. Radimer *et al* (1990) therefore recommended that these four components (quantity, quality, psychological and social) should be included in a conceptual definition of food poverty. Later research further confirmed that these four domains form the basis of household food insecurity experience (Coates *et al*., 2006), therefore indicating that definition and measurement approaches should be grounded upon these four domains (Coates *et al*., 2006). Radimer *et al* (1992) compiled the aforementioned four domains to produce the following definition that household food insecurity is

> *"the inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so"* (Radimer *et al*., 1992, p.39).

Construction of previous food poverty definitions has been informed by empirical research with those experiencing food poverty (e.g. Radimer *et al*., 1992), or following a review of existing definitions (e.g. O'Connor *et al*., 2016). There is however currently no published data relating to stakeholders (i.e. those who have the potential to make, influence or inform policy and decisions relating to social issues such as food poverty) opinions regarding food poverty definition. This study aims to address this gap, with the specific research objectives of considering stakeholders opinion on (i) the usefulness of a food poverty definition in NI/the UK, (ii) what a food poverty definition should include, and (iii) the applicability of an existing definition in the NI/UK context. Radimer *et al*'s (1992) definition was considered most

appropriate to underpin this research and to be used as the definition for stakeholder analysis, as it was constructed following a process of primary qualitative research with those experiencing food poverty, the purpose of which was to conceptualise the food poverty experience. Further, this definition encapsulates the main domains of food poverty discussed in the literature, and has generally good agreement with other published food poverty definitions.

Methods

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse group of stakeholders (n=19) from a range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations across Northern Ireland. Some of these stakeholders worked with those in food poverty on a daily basis (e.g. food bank practitioner, community advice centre manager) and others had contact with those in food poverty on a fairly regular basis (e.g. political councillors, local government community workers). Some had a job remit which involved activity to aid those experiencing food poverty (e.g. food redistribution organisation representative, community project co-ordinator), and others had experience of considering food poverty from a decision-making level (e.g. policy development managers, public health executive). Individual stakeholder interviews were deemed most suitable to obtain open and honest answers to the research questions, and minimise the social desirability bias (Fisher, 1993) in responses which may occur had stakeholder data collection taken place in a group setting.

Interview topic guide

This research was part of a larger study which examined stakeholders' views on a range of topics related to food poverty, of which food poverty definition was one. Therefore an interview topic guide was compiled following consultation of the academic and grey literature, and preliminary discussion with stakeholders (n=2) from public health and community advice perspectives, who were not included in the eventual sample. This interview topic guide consisted of questions arranged in six themes related to food poverty, of which one was definition. Stakeholders were asked their perception as to what the term 'food poverty' means, how they see it experienced in their line of work if relevant, and what elements they therefore think a food poverty definition should include. Stakeholders were then shown the Radimer *et al* (1992) definition, as presented above, and asked their opinion on it in relation to present day food poverty experience in NI/the UK (see table 1 for relevant questions excerpted from the interview topic guide, and an overview of the purpose and rationale for questions asked).

Table 1: Topic guide excerpt relating to food poverty definition

Question	*Purpose*	*Rationale*
Are you aware of the term 'food poverty'/'food insecurity'? - Is it a term you would be familiar with/encounter in your line of work? - What does this term mean to you? [Show Radimer *et al.*, 1992 definition] - Do you think this definition is accurate? - Do you think that there is anything missing or any way it could be improved?	To find out participants' perspectives of food poverty by asking them what the term 'food poverty' means to them and what, in their opinion, a definition should include. These questions were asked to determine respondents' opinions on how relevant or accurate the Radimer *et al* (1992) definition is, particularly in comparison with how they formerly defined food poverty.	Le *et al* (2015) asked a similar question ("What are the first things you think of when you hear the term *"food access"* or "*food security*?") during community focus groups to gauge awareness in their study on food insecurity. The definition shown (Radimer *et al.*, 1992) is cited commonly in the academic literature.

The main interview questions were used to attain overall perceptions and ideas about the topic, while follow-up questions / pre-determined probes provided additional depth (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). A responsive interviewing model (Rubin and Rubin, 2005) was followed so that a conversational style of interview was maintained, and the researcher adapted the approach as necessary according to the experience and attitude of interviewees.

Participant selection

Before selecting a sample of participants to invite to interview it was important to consider whose perspectives would be most useful and appropriate in light of the interview topic guide and focus of the research. As it was important to get a variety of perspectives, a range of stakeholders (e.g. policy makers, political representatives, food bank and food redistribution organisation representatives, consumer sub-group representatives, community advice centre workers, academics) were invited to interview. Stakeholder relevance was determined by eligibility criteria that they either work in, or have an interest in the area of food poverty, or work closely with or on behalf of consumer groups, some of whom may experience food poverty. Some of the participants were previously known to the research team, and some had agreed to an interview prior to being sent an email with further information. Others were unknown to the research team but were contacted in order to increase the variety of groups represented in the sample. Selected participants were contacted via email to explain the purpose of the research and what their participation would involve. A total of 30 suitable participants were contacted and 19 of these correspondences progressed to interview. Participants were contacted on an ongoing basis between October 2017-May 2018 and interviews continued until it was believed an appropriate range and number of groups had been represented and data

saturation had been reached. Contacting participants on an ongoing basis and recording correspondence outcomes allowed for continuous evaluation of the participant sample to assess which perspectives should be recruited next, for example if a participant from a certain perspective did not respond to the invitation to participate, an alternative person from a similar perspective was identified and contacted.

Ethics

Ethical permission was sought and granted from [anonymised for review] Research Ethics Committee. All participants read and signed a participant consent form which detailed how their data (interview transcript) would be used and stored. Anonymity of the participants was assured throughout by ensuring that no interviewee was identifiable from their answers.

Interview format

Interviews were arranged for a date, time and location convenient to participants, and lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. Interviews were carried out over a period of six months. All interviews were audio-recorded, apart from one when the participant declined to be recorded, and detailed field notes were instead taken.

Data analysis

Data were analysed and overarching themes identified using a six-stage inductive thematic analysis process recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). Interviews were transcribed and transcripts read and re-read to achieve data immersion prior to analysis. Transcripts were firstly

read and re-read in hard copy and first level coded (i.e. key words / themes were noted in the margin). Transcripts were re-read and second level coded to deduct meaning from key words and themes in order to ascertain what respondents were actually saying about the topic. A codebook was developed containing predetermined codes related to the interview topic guide and research objectives. Transcripts were then coded using qualitative analysis software QSR NVivo (v.12) according to both predetermined and emerging codes. A total of 80 codes (and 17 sub codes) were identified and recorded on NVivo. Transcripts were re-read and summary sheets made for each, to allow further immersion in the data. Codes were then examined to find common themes, and from this four main preliminary themes were identified. At this point transcripts were again re-read and an overview of three to five themes or main points emerging from each interview were noted. The 'themes' of each individual transcript were then compiled and considered in order to group common themes for the entire dataset. The purpose of this was to check if the preliminary themes emanating from the identified codes were similar to the themes coming from the transcripts. This confirmed that the themes emanating from the codes were the same themes / main points from each interview. During initial examination of codes and identification of themes, a certain number of codes were excluded on the basis of not aligning with any of the identified themes, as they were either largely irrelevant to the study or represented a very small proportion of the data. At this stage however, the content attached to each original code was re-read to check that they aligned with their allocated theme, and to ensure that none of the excluded codes contained relevant data. At this point any irrelevant codes were removed from further analysis. Codes were then grouped into subthemes, with a total of two subthemes identified within each theme. Codes and identified themes and subthemes were checked by three additional researchers to increase the validity and reliability of results.

One of the four themes emanating from the overarching research was the *'Need to raise awareness and provide evidence'*, with the corresponding subthemes of *'Defining food poverty'* and *'Measuring food poverty'*. The following results which address the aim of this study are therefore extracted from the subtheme *'Defining food poverty'*. Where there was clear similarity of opinion among stakeholders, findings are presented alongside numerical indication as to the strength of opinion among participants.

Results

Discussion on food poverty definition centred on four main themes: the need to define food poverty to aid understanding; consideration as to whether food poverty should be defined separately from the overarching poverty nomenclature; stakeholders' perceptions as to what a food poverty definition should include; and opinions on an existing food poverty definition.

Defining to understand

Some stakeholders perceived there to be a greater awareness around fuel poverty, as unlike food poverty it has been afforded a standardised definition and approach. Several participants (n=10) commented that in the absence of a food poverty definition, it is more difficult to raise food poverty as an issue, and to get attention from the media or government for change:

> *'If you can't define it then it's easier for other people to argue against it.'*
>
> (Participant 2, Consumer representative)

Therefore a definition and measure would provide the vocabulary needed to talk about food poverty in a more focused way to aid understanding:

'"Having a definition and a measure… give[s] *people the vocabulary they need to then talk about it in a very focused way.'* (Participant 18, Consumer organisation)

Inclusion or exclusion of food poverty from the poverty nomenclature

Respondents' views were mixed on whether food poverty should be separated from the overarching poverty nomenclature, or whether it is adequate to continue to include it within the general poverty bracket. The majority (n=12) felt that the problem of food poverty was sufficiently big to merit being separated, and that differentiating food poverty from the poverty nomenclature would allow for more specific consideration as to how this aspect of poverty can be addressed. However, others (n=4) were adamant that food poverty is just one part of a larger systemic problem of poverty generally, and that it should be tackled as a whole, as it is difficult to separate them. One *community worker / campaigner* made the point that no matter how many labels you put on it, whether child [poverty], fuel [poverty], or food [poverty], '*it's all the same, it's all symptomatic of systematic poverty.'*

Overall, the majority (n=12) agreed that food poverty should have a separate definition and measurement mechanism. A stakeholder from a social policy perspective (participant 8) who did not necessarily agree food poverty should be defined and measured as a separate entity to poverty, conceded that '*because we're so far down the road now talking about fuel poverty',* food poverty should also perhaps be afforded a separate measure in order to gain the same policy attention and action. It was said by one public health participant that the reason fuel poverty is '*streets ahead'* in terms of having policy attention and resources allocated to tackling the issue is because it has been singularly defined.

Elements of a definition

When asked to consider their perception of how food poverty should be defined, financial and physical access to food were the two elements most commonly cited as important. It was acknowledged that physical access encompasses more than just proximity to food retailers, but also considers those who are impaired bodily from being able to physically access food, for example due to reduced mobility or disability.

Several stakeholders (n=12) discussed that a definition should primarily reference food poverty as an affordability/income issue, however the importance of skills and knowledge to enable people to use their money to budget effectively and adequately feed themselves was also emphasised.

One interviewee felt that achieving consensus on the defining characteristics of the food poverty experience would provide a basis for identifying and addressing contributors:

> *'If these are the characteristics or elements that make up food poverty, presumably the point of looking at this is to look at what are the drivers and how do we influence them?'* (Participant 6, Campaigning organisation)

There was consensus that having an agreed definition and measurement approach could enable a more strategic approach to solving the problem/helping those in need, because although there are projects/interventions in place, it is difficult to assess their impact without an agreed

definition and measure. Furthermore, it is more difficult to react appropriately without a definition:

> *'If we don't understand what we're dealing with then how do we react appropriately to it?'* (Participant 19, Political Councillor)

It was also acknowledged that ignorance is a problem:

> *'I think people don't really think it exists…. unless you're experiencing it or you work* [in it].' (Participant 12, Community Advice)

When discussing how food poverty should be defined there was consensus that the breadth of the issue is a barrier and that due to the broad scope of food poverty it can be difficult to quantify.

Stakeholder perceptions of existing food poverty definition

Participants were shown the below definition by Radimer *et al* (1992, p. 39) and asked their views on how it aligns with their definition / perception of food poverty:

> *'*[Food poverty is] *the inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.'*

Although the consensus on this definition was generally positive, stakeholders had various interpretations of and queries regarding some of the terminology. It was felt that the definition lacked accuracy regarding quantification of food poverty:

> *"This is a general good start; it gets in the right direction but it lacks that quantification which we absolutely need to really get a handle on this."* (Participant 9, Academic)

It was felt that being able to quantify the extent of food poverty would be particularly useful for campaigning and gaining subsequent policy attention for change.

One participant questioned how the term 'adequate quality' is defined:

> *'The first thing that comes to mind is what constitutes adequate?'* (Participant 6, Campaigning organisation),

therefore indicating that some subjectivity may exist around defining the adequacy of food, as what is adequate or sufficient to one person may not be to another.

Interviewee comments regarding the Radimer *et al* (1992) definition indicated an evident need for clarity regarding terminology used. For example one participant questioned if the term 'quality' refers to adequate quality nutritionally, or adequate quality from a retailer perspective i.e. consideration of issues such as safety and production standards.

Data collection highlighted the importance of terminology being easily understood and relevant as some participants were unsure as to what the term 'socially acceptable ways' referred to. Additionally;

> *"What's socially acceptable for one person might be completely different for others."* (Participant 19, Political Councillor)

One community advice centre worker justified why the 'socially acceptable' phrase is a relevant inclusion in the Radimer *et al* (2012) definition, citing insight from a discussion with a group of health care professionals, who revealed that people will tell them they don't have financial problems, but when they ask about their diet they find out *"they're not eating in socially acceptable ways, they're living on sandwiches"*.

Discussion

Although there is consensus among stakeholders and in the literature that food poverty is difficult to define due to the multi-dimensionality of the concept, there was also a consensus among stakeholders that agreeing a definition would be a worthy pursuit to aid understanding of the concept of food poverty, and consequently to afford it similar attention to its counterpart fuel poverty, which has secured a standardised definition / measurement approach.

A government-endorsed definition of food poverty could increase understanding of the issue, both for those working in related areas, and for the general public. Public understanding of food poverty is perhaps limited and the majority of the general public's awareness of food poverty is likely due to increasing awareness of food banks, whose exponential increase has been often reported in the media (Wells and Caraher, 2014). However, to aid its understanding

it is important that the meaning of terminology used is clear in the context of the definition. This was made apparent during the interviews as several stakeholders had queries regarding the terminology used in the Radimer *et al* (1992) definition. Archer *et al* (2017) conducted qualitative research with stakeholders regarding opinions about food poverty definition and measurement approach with the aim of developing a new measurement tool for Australia. They similarly found that stakeholders had queries about the meaning of the term 'quality food', and of the highly subjective nature of the term, and therefore suggested that the term 'safe food' be used instead. Findings from this research would also suggest that when the term 'quality' is used in food insecurity definitions or measurement questions, further context should be provided, i.e. indication of whether the term is intended to refer to adequate quality nutritionally, adequate quality from a retailer perspective (e.g. safety, production standards), or adequate quality from a consumer perspective (e.g. appearance, flavour, origin). Anderson's (1990) previously introduced definition of household food insecurity (adopted by the USDA) is more specific in the terminology it uses, referring to food insecurity as occurring when a household has limited availability of, or uncertain ability to acquire 'nutritionally adequate', 'safe', and 'acceptable' foods.

There was a general consensus among stakeholders that food poverty should be separated from the poverty nomenclature in having a separate definition and measure. This view is consistent with the apparent trend in the academic literature (Dowler and O'Connor., 2012; Sissons *et al.*, 2018; O'Connell *et al.*, 2019; Loopstra *et al.*, 2019) and among various public and private sector organisations (Consumer Council, 2001; Purdy *et al*., 2007; Douglas *et al*., 2015; King *et al*., 2015) of discussing food poverty separately to poverty. The recent decision by government to routinely measure food poverty in the UK with an agreed household food insecurity measure (Butler, 2019) also evidences opinion at the government level of the

importance of considering food poverty separately to poverty. In light of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reducing food poverty is a target for many countries (Maricic *et al*., 2016). Therefore an agreed, endorsed definition of food poverty in the UK can increase public, policy makers, and practitioners' awareness and understanding of this societal issue. Definition of the concept is an important first step to inform construction and evaluation of measurement approaches, and ultimately to assess predictors and formulate recommendations for associated policy change.

As presented in this paper there has been a successive shift in food poverty definition, from an original focus on availability, to one of access (both physical and economic), to specifying issues of food safety and nutrition, to issues of social acceptability. When discussing important components of a measure, stakeholders as a whole referenced all of these elements as important. Physical and economic access were primarily considered among stakeholders to be the most important, while opinion was divided as to whether the social acceptability dimension was necessary. Some felt that referencing social exclusion issues associated with food poverty (e.g. being unable to afford to have friends or family over for a meal, or unable to eat out) in a definition wasn't necessary, and that food poverty definitions and measures should instead focus on immediate issues of sustenance. It was considered that issues of social exclusion resulting from food poverty may not be enough to get policy attention for change as opposed to issues of hunger or malnutrition which are securing increased policy attention especially regarding older people and hospital admissions and discharges (BAPEN, 2019). As previously discussed in the introduction, a similar viewpoint has been cited in the media, which has reported perspectives that food poverty in developed countries cannot be likened to that in developing countries, as it is viewed to be less extreme (O'Hagan, 2013; Lanchester, 2014; Purdam *et al*., 2016). However, other stakeholders in this study, particularly those who work

in the community, or who advocate on behalf of consumers, were of the viewpoint that consideration of social exclusion is of paramount importance. Many discussed the importance of accounting for social exclusion because of the potential associated mental health problems it may cause. Although there is an emphasis in the literature on the biological and nutritional consequences of food insecurity (e.g. hunger and malnutrition) (Weaver *et al.*, 2014; Tarasuk *et al*., 2015; Purdam *et al.*, 2016), there is an increasing focus in the literature which connects food poverty with social factors and consequences (Moffat *et al*., 2017; Willis and Fitzpatrick, 2017; Caraher and Furey, 2018). O'Connell *et al* (2019) discuss how those on low incomes are likely to make compromises not only on the quantity and quality of food, but are also likely to have reduced social participation (e.g. less able to eat out, or entertain friends, family, or children's friends), and may have less socially acceptable ways of accessing food (e.g. attending food banks). A recent study by Healy (2019) supports the inclusion of a question examining food poverty-related social exclusion in measurement modules, and considers that recognising this association can shift focus to implementing broader solutions based upon issues of social justice, as opposed to solutions pertaining only to suppling more food. Stakeholders' views regarding the importance of acknowledging the social aspects of food poverty therefore align with similar viewpoints in the literature, and with definitions of food poverty which include reference to the ability to acquire food in socially acceptable ways (e.g. Anderson, 1990; Radimer *et al*., 1992; O'Connor et al., 2016). Further, stakeholders felt that simply providing more food (i.e. focusing on the 'quantity' as opposed to the nutritional 'quality' aspect of the definition) was not appropriate as it does not align with health recommendations, and that it is therefore important instead to emphasise the importance of nutritious food. This view was particularly strong from those who worked in health policy or nutrition. Ayala and Meier (2017) similarly discuss how food and nutrition security are interconnected and should be considered simultaneously to address related health challenges.

Limitations

It is acknowledged that a potential limitation of this research was the absence of input from those experiencing food poverty. It is however considered that the input from a variety of stakeholders working at the community level provided perspectives from a range of consumers that would not have otherwise all have been represented. Further, as previous research has examined the views of those experiencing food poverty, this study aimed to address the gap in perspectives from those who make, influence or inform policy and decisions relating to social issues such as food poverty.

Conclusions

There is consensus both in the literature and from stakeholders that the multifaceted nature of food poverty renders the task of creating an all-encompassing definition difficult, however it is an important step to increase awareness and understanding. Therefore, it is recommended that an agreed definition be adopted by the UK pertaining to how food poverty is defined. UK creation of a new food poverty definition, or endorsement / adoption of a current definition could help to raise awareness and provide those working in the area with a clear picture as to what is food poverty. Stakeholders' perceptions of Radimer *et al's* (1992) definition were examined and findings indicate that this definition was generally well understood, and generally encapsulated stakeholders' prior conceived ideas and observed experiences of food poverty. However, there was a noted need for increased clarity around some of the terms included in the definition as certain terms *('adequate quality'* and *'socially acceptable ways'*) were not fully understood by some participants. It is therefore recommended that any definition constructed should use terminology which is not ambiguous and which is understandable to all, and especially to those for whom it is designed for use (e.g. policymakers, practitioners,

the public). Any consideration of revising the Radimer *et al* (1992) definition, or of establishing a commonly agreed / standardised definition of food poverty for use in the UK / NI context, should seek to reduce / remove ambiguity and subjectivity of terminology used (i.e. more clearly defining what the terms 'adequate', 'sufficient', 'quality', and 'socially acceptable ways' mean in this context).

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